

Message Text

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY LE

SUBJECT: KHADDAM REVIEWS SYRIAN THINKING ON LEBANON

REF: 6672

SUMMARY. KHADDAM HAS CANCELLED HIS PLANNED TRAVEL TO THE STATES NEXT WEEK BECAUSE OF COMPLEX LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS. SYRIA IS WEIGHING UP ITS POLITICAL AND MILITARY OPTIONS FOR NEXT STAGE BUT HAS NOT YET DECIDED ON BEST WAY TO KEEP ITS OPPONENTS IN LEBANON ON THE RUN. LEBANESE ARAB ARMY CAN HANDLE ANY CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH LEBANON IF THAT COURSE SHOULD BE CHOSEN. LEFTIST/PALESTINIANS RETAIN SIGNIFICANT MILITARY CLOUT. COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN LEBANON IS STILL GROWING AND SYRIA WILL NOT TOLERATE A COMMUNIST STATE ON ITS BORDER. FON MIN BELIEVES SARKIS IS CONDEMNED FOR MOMENT TO SIT ON SIDELINES.

1. MET WITH KHADDAM AT 2300L AT HIS REQUEST. FOR FIRST TIME HE RECEIVED ME WITHOUT NOTETAKER OR INTERPRETER. HE APPEARED HAGGARD AND SAID HE WAS SPENDING ALL HIS DAYS AND MOST NIGHTS IN SERIES OF MEETINGS CONCERNING LEBANESE

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CRISIS. HE HAD ASKED TO SEE ME PRINCIPALLY TO EXPRESS HIS

KEEN REGRET THAT HE HAD HAD TO DECIDE IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO TRAVEL TO THE STATES NEXT WEEK. HE PARTICULARLY REGRETTED MISSING THE CHANCE TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT FORD AND THE SECRETARY AND HOPED THAT HIS VISIT MIGHT BE RESCHEDULED LATER. HE SENDS HIS BEST WISHES AND APOLIGIES FOR HAVING TO CANCEL ARRANGEMENTS ALREADY MADE FOR HIS VSIIT.

2. SAID HE THOUGHT SECRETARY'S COMMENT ABOUT LEBANON IN HIS UNGA SPEECH HAD BEEN EXCELLENT, "JUST WHAT NEEDED SAYING."

3. ASKED HIM WHAT HE FORESAW IN LEBANONFOR IMMEDIATE FUTURE. KHADDAM REPLIED THAT IN THE WAKE OF THE METN CAMPAIGN, SYRIA'S OPPONENTS WERE REGROUPING AND PLAYING FOR TIME. DAMASCUS, HE CONFESSED, WAS UNSURE WHETHER ITS NEXT STEP SHOULD BE POLITICAL OR MILITARY. BUT IT WAS DETERMINED NOT TO LET THE OPPOSITION GAIN THE TIME IT DESIRED. THE METN CAMPAIGN HAD BEEN A ROUT; THE OPPOSITION WAS ON THE RUN AND HAD LOST HEAVILY PSYCHOLOGICALLY.

4. THERE WERE ELEMENTS HE ASSUMED AMONG THE PALESTINIANS AND THE LEBANESE LEFTISTS WHO WERE READY TO MOVE TO SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS BUT SYRIA HAD NOT YET IDENTIFIED PRECISELY WHO THEY WERE AND THE STRENGTH THEY COULD COMMAND IN THEIR OWN CAMPS. I COMMENTED THAT IN THAT CASE, RECALLING HIS EARLIER STATED AVERSION TO DRAWN OUT NEGOTIATIONS, HE SEEMD TO BE SAYING THAT SYRIA WAS INCLINED TO TAKE ANOTHER MILITARY STEP. IF SO, WOULD THIS BE TOWARDS THE SOUTH, THE NORTH, TOWARDS TRIPOLI OR BEIRUT? FONMIN REITERATED THAT SARG HAD NOT DECIDED ON A MILITARY MOVE. SHOULD IT SO DECIDE, THE LEBANESE ARAB ARMY WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO HANDLE THE SOUTH BY ITSELF. HE KNEW CHAMOUN WAS INTERESTED IN AN ATTACK ON KHALDE AND WEST BEIRUT BUT THIS WOULD BE TOO DANGEROUS. (HE POINTEDLY MADE NO COMMENT ABOUT TRIPOLI.) ANY NEW CAMPAIGN, HE NOTED, HAD TO RECKON WITH THE FACT THAT THE PALESTINIANS/ LEFTISTS WERE NOW COOPED UP IN A SMALLER AREA, REGROUPED AND ABLE TO PUT UP A MUCH BETTER RESISTANCE THAN THEY HAD DONE IN THE METN,.

5. COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN LEBANON. THIS HAD GROWN ALARMINGLY,
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KHADDAM ASSERTED. WOULD-BE LEFTISTS IN CAIRO AND ODD FIGURES SUCH AS JUMBLATT, WHOM HE TERMED "ANOTHER SIHANOUK" WERE ABETTING THE COMMUNISTS. HAD SYRIA NOT GONE IN MILITARILY THE SIGNIFICANT COMMUNIST INFLUENCE APPARENT IN LEBANON EARLIER THIS YEAR WOULD HAVE SWELLED EVEN FURTHER. SYRIA HE ASSERTED WITH PASSION WILL YIELD TO NONE IN BEING A PROGRESSVVE STATE BUT IT IS ABSOLUTELY OPPOSED TO THE TYPE OF "PROGRESSIVISM" IT SAW GROWING ON ITS BORDER. THAT

REPRESENTED A THREAT TO SYRIA. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE REFERRED TO THE INCREASING NUMBER OF IRAQI TROOPS IN LEBANON WHICH HE SAID NOW EXCEEDED FOUR THOUSAND. HE HAD JUST SPOKEN WITH AMIN GAMAYYEL WHO HAD DEBRIEFED A RECENTLY CAPTURED GROUP OF IRAQIS. THEY TOLD HIM OF HOW THEY HAD FLOWN TO CAIRO AND TRAVELLED TO SIDON BY SHIP FROM ALEXANDRIA. "YOUR LEFTIST FRIENDS THE EGYPTIANS SEEM TO BE GETTING ADVICE FROM YOU", HE CRACKED . REPLIED THAT THE EGYPTIANS HAD PLENTY OF HOME GROWN ADVISORS FOR SUCH MATTERS. ASKED WHAT HE THOUGHT FAHMY WAS SEEKING IN PARIS, KHADDAM SNAPPED" FRENCH INTERVENTION FOR OLD TIMES SAKE" BUT QUICKLY ADDED HE HAD NO SPECIFIC INFORMATION.

6. SARKIS. I SAID THIS WHOLE TREND OF EVENTS SEEMED TO HAVE PLACED SARKIS IN A DIFFICULT AND IMPOTENT POSITION. KHADDAM AGREED AND ADDED THAT AS HE SAW MATTERS SARKIS HAD LITTLE CHOICE BUT QUIETLY TO SIT OUT THE PRESENT STAGE.

7. SUMMITRY. KHADDAM DISMISSED THE PROSPECT OF ANY EARLY ARAB SUMMIT, BE IT WITH FOUR, SIX OR ALL CHIEFS OF STATE IN ATTENDANCE. "FOR NOW, THERE IS NOTHING TO TALK ABOUT AT A SUMMIT."

8. COMMENT. A PRETTY FRANK SUMMARY OF SYRIA'S PRESENT UNCERTAINTIES MIXED WITH ITS DETERMINATION TO KEEP THE PRESSURE ON ITS OPPONENTS IN LEBANON. I WAS PARTICULARLY STRUCK BY HIS CALM ACCEPTANCE OF THE MILITARY PUNCH STILL IN THE HANDS OF SYRIA'S OPPONENTS AND LACK OF ANY SENSE OF GLOATING OVER SYRIAN SUCCESSES IN THE METN.
MURPHY

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